



U.S. Senator

Jim Jeffords



Summer, 2000

United States Senate

Report from Washington

Dear Fellow Vermonter:

It has been an exciting and busy year in the nation's Capital. In my roles as the Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I have been working on issues that have a real impact on all Vermonters. I am proud to have served Vermont in the United States Congress for close to twenty-six years, and am very pleased to be in a position to make a difference.

In recent months I have traveled from Middlebury to St. Johnsbury, Enosburg to Brattleboro, listening to your concerns on important issues. Issues such as making prescription drugs more affordable, improving our schools, improving the quality of our health care, and shoring up crucial programs like Social Security and Medicare are top among them. As we tackle these problems, I strongly believe that we must work together in a bi-partisan fashion. I am proud to serve Vermonters in a tradition of independence and individualism that makes our State so unique.

As you know, I value deeply the opinions of Vermonters, whether they are offered in person, by phone, in letters or by e-mail. And, as usual I'll be spending as much time as I can in Vermont. In the meantime, I hope you find this newsletter informative.

Sincerely,

Jim Jeffords

Making Prescription Drugs More Affordable and Accessible

Prescription medicines have revolutionized the treatment of certain diseases, but they are only effective if patients have access to the medicines that their doctors prescribe. The best medicines in the world will not help a person who can not afford them. And they can actually do more harm than good if taken with the improper dosage.

On May 9, Senator Jeffords introduced S. 2520, the Medicine Equity and Drug Safety (MEDS) Act, which will allow pharmacists and wholesalers to get the same Food and Drug Administration-approved drugs sold at lower prices in other countries, and pass the savings on to consumers in the U.S. This bipartisan proposal builds on legislation he introduced last year that would allow imports from Canada for personal use, and borrows from another bill cosponsored by Congress-

man Sanders in the House that would allow reimportation of prescription drugs that were made in U.S. facilities.

The most important aspect of this bill is safety. The MEDS Act preserves the FDA's gold standard for safety by letting the experts at the FDA determine the best mechanism for allowing such imports.

The MEDS Act is not the only solution to the problem of high prescription drug costs. The Senator strongly believes we need to enact a broad prescription drug benefit, and he is currently working through the Finance Committee to ensure that a prescription drugs are a part of whatever Medicare reform legislation is enacted this year. But the MEDS Act is a positive, bipartisan measure that can be implemented *now* to bring prescription drug prices down for all Americans.

continued next page



Dairy Compact Extended

Last year Senator Jeffords helped secure a 2-year extension of the Northeast Dairy Compact and the permanent extension of Option 1A, a federal pricing structure beneficial to Vermont dairy farmers. Called the most important issue before Congress last year by Vermont Governor Howard Dean, Senator Jeffords secured key support for the Compact from Senate and House leaders. The compact, enacted in 1996, has been vital to preserving a fair price for milk that is produced in Vermont. The compact has added more than \$45 million to Vermont's agricultural economy and has helped protect Vermont farmers from the volatility in the price of milk experienced by the rest of the nation. ***If you are interested in information regarding the Northeast Dairy Compact please visit the Compact Commission website at www.dairycompact.org.***

Campaign Finance Reform



Senator Jeffords is seen here with other sponsors of legislation to increase the disclosure rules for so-called 527 tax-exempt groups. These groups exploit a recently discovered loophole in the tax code that allows organizations seeking to influence federal elections to fund election work with undisclosed and unlimited contributions at the same time they claim exemption from both federal taxation and the federal election laws. Jeffords was a cosponsor of the legislation, which President Clinton recently signed into law.

Prescription Drug Affordability (continued)

Senator Jeffords has sponsored other bills that will help Vermont seniors get their prescriptions *right now*, even if a comprehensive Medicare reform proves to be elusive this year. The first is the DrugGap Insurance for Seniors Act (S. 1725), which will provide insurance coverage for prescription medicines free of charge for low-income Vermonters who do not get drugs through Medicaid or employer sponsored coverage. The second is the Pharmaceutical Aid for Seniors Act (S. 1942), which will give federal support to State Pharmaceutical Assistance Programs, like Vermont's V-Script program. These programs help low income seniors afford prescription drugs. This bill would also direct federal funds to state-run medication management programs so that Vermont seniors can get the pharmacist counseling that they need to avoid foreseeable adverse drug interactions that come from treating multiple diseases with multiple medications.

Veterans Health Care

Working with the Vermont delegation, Senator Jeffords helped secure \$7 million for a rural health care project at the Veterans Medical Center in White River Junction. In addition, the Senate Finance Committee approved legislation introduced by Senator Jeffords that will allow more veterans access to the Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility of their choice. The legislation, known as Medicare Subvention, would give Medicare-eligible veterans the ability to use their Medicare entitlement when seeking care at a local VA medical facility. Veterans not currently receiving their care at the VA would be allowed to get their Medicare-covered care at the VA. The bill establishes a three-year demonstration project at up to 8 sites around the nation. It includes a requirement that 2 sites be designated in a region that serves a rural population. Senator Jeffords hopes that the White River Junction Veterans Hospital will be chosen as one of these demonstration sites.

For more information on federal Veterans issues you can contact the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs at 1-800-827-1000 or on the web at <http://www.va.gov>.

Jeffords' Landmark Disability Bill Enacted

The Work Incentives Improvement Act, first introduced by Senator Jeffords in 1996, has been hailed as the biggest step forward for the disability community since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. More than 9.5 million disabled Americans, including over 24,000 Vermonters, automatically lose federal health benefits if they earn more than \$500 in one month. Under the legislation, severely disabled individuals will be able to remain in or return to the workforce without losing the federal health benefits necessary for their daily living. In addition, they will have access to more job training and placement assistance than is currently available. President Clinton signed this bill into law on December 17, 1999.

For more information on disability issues in Vermont contact: the Vermont Association of Business Industry & Rehabilitation (VABIR) at 800-639-2909 or on the web at <http://www.VABIR.com>; or the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at 800-361-1239 or on the web at <http://www.dad.state.vt.us/dvr/>

Vermont Sees Increase in Special Education Funding

Senator Jeffords continued to lead Senate efforts to increase funding for special education, pushing for increased funding for fiscal year 2001. The fiscal year 2000 appropriations bill for the Department of Education increased funding for special education by \$679 million above the President's request. Over the past 4 years, Senator Jeffords and others have increased special education funding dramatically. Thanks to this increase and to a formula change Senator Jeffords included in the 1997 rewrite of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Vermont will receive \$10,152,000 in special education funding this year, compared to \$4,547,917 in 1996, a 123 percent increase.

Oil Prices



Senator Jeffords recently helped make a home heating oil delivery in South Burlington to highlight his concern that fuel prices will again spike this winter. He has taken several steps to address the home heating oil crisis including:

- Calling for the creation a Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve;
- Educating consumers on benefits of pre-purchasing their winter's fuel needs;
- Pushing domestic and OPEC refiners to increase production of fuel oils;
- Requesting the Federal Trade Commission to investigate increases in fuel prices;
- Calling on the President to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

Jeffords Legislation to Strengthen Medicare Passes

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Jeffords helped develop legislation that will add \$11 billion to Medicare and restore an estimated \$34 million to Vermont's health care providers over the next five years. The bill contained a number of important changes to Medicare that will more fairly compensate Vermont's home health agencies, doctors, nursing homes, and rural hospitals. Among these provisions is one that will put Vermont's sole teaching hospital, Fletcher Allen, on a par with other New England teaching hospitals. The bill will increase Medicare reimbursement to Fletcher Allen, which provides half of all hospital services in the state, by almost \$5 million in fiscal year 2000 alone.

Jeffords Working to Pass Patients' Bill of Rights

Last year, the Senate passed "The Patients' Bill of Rights." This legislation represents the most significant Congressional effort since 1974 to establish new managed care patient protections. It was based on legislation which Senator Jeffords introduced and which was approved by the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

This fall, the House passed its companion bill and a Senate/House conference committee has been appointed. As the Chairman of the Committee which has the primary jurisdiction over these issues, the Senator has been appointed as one of the 12 Senate conferees.



"The Patients' Bill of Rights" will provide managed care protections for the 98,000 Vermonters who are not covered by State protections and the right to an independent external appeal for everyone who has employer-provided health insurance. It would also ban the use of predictive genetic information for insurance underwriting purposes and it allows for the full deduction of health insurance for the self-employed.

Both bills also include a prudent layperson standard for emergency care, a mandatory point-of-service option, direct access to OB/GYNs and pediatricians, a guarantee of continuity of care, a prohibition on gag rules, access to medication, access to specialists, access to approved clinical trials, and provider non-discrimination provisions.

In spite of the political hurdles, Senator Jeffords believes that Congress can produce solid legislation that will result in a greatly improved health care system for Vermonters and all Americans. The opportunity exists to expand patient protections without significantly increasing premiums and adding to the number of uninsured. He remains hopeful that the conference committee will be able to move forward and produce compromise legislation that can be passed by Congress and signed into law by the President.

Volunteer Fire Departments Receive \$500,000 in Funding Through Jeffords Grant Program

185 volunteer fire departments from across Vermont have been awarded grants totaling \$500,000 through the Jeffords Fire Fighter Safety Grant program. Senator Jeffords secured the funding for the program last year to assist volunteer firefighters across Vermont in purchasing personal safety equipment.

Vermont has 224 fire departments, and all but 13 are staffed by volunteers. Of Vermont's 6,500 firefighters, approximately 6,250 are volunteers. The program is administered by the Vermont Rural Fire Protection Task Force, and provides local fire departments the resources to provide proper safety gear for all their volunteers.

A former volunteer firefighter in Shrewsbury, the Senator visited the Pittsford fire station in March, 1999. During the visit, he heard from volunteer firefighters about their needs, and responded with the grant program.

For additional information contact Dennis Borchardt at the George D. Aiken Development Council, at 802-728-9526.

Jeffords Leads Education Efforts:

Funding for Bookmobiles

Jeffords joined Governor Dean and Vermont State Librarian Sybil McShane at a press conference in Montpelier in April to kick-off National Library Week and to announce that he had secured \$940,796 for a new fleet of bookmobiles in Vermont. Jeffords included the funding as part of the fiscal year 2000 spending bill for the Institute for Museum and Library Services. With the approximate average price of a bookmobile at about \$100,000 dollars, this funding will mean a new fleet of bookmobiles criss-crossing the state. The funding will support bookmobiles throughout Vermont with the goal of promoting access to books, reading programs, and information through technology.

Pell Grants

Jeffords continued to lead the fight, as he has done throughout his years in Congress, for an increase in the Pell Grant. The Pell Grant is the cornerstone of our federal investment in need-based student financial assistance—offering needed assistance for postsecondary education to approximately 3.8 million students nationwide. In Vermont, 9,300 students are anticipated to benefit from the Pell Grant in the 2000-2001 school year. A \$3,300 maximum grant was adopted for fiscal year 2000. The Higher Education Amendments of 1998, sponsored by the Senator, provided a significant increase in the authorized Pell Grant maximum.

Students looking for information on Pell Grants and student loans can call VSAC at 1-800-642-3177 or go to its

website at www.vsac.org or contact the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN.

21st Century Community Learning Centers Act

Continuing its rapid expansion, this program has reached the \$453 million mark. Authored by Senator Jeffords in 1994, based on the H.O. Wheeler School in Burlington, the program has grown from only \$1 million in funding in fiscal year 1996. It provides grants to schools to expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural and recreational needs of the community. This year's funding increase permitted an expansion of the program in Burlington and new grants to Rutland, Waitsfield, and Plainfield.

Human Resource Investment Council Grant

Vermont was one of the first states to establish both a statewide workforce development effort with the creation of the Human Resources Investment Council and the grassroots creation of Workforce Investment Boards. As a result of Vermont's leadership in workforce preparedness, the Vermont Human Resource Investment Council has been awarded a \$617,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to implement a statewide workforce investment initiative. The \$617,000 will be used to fund education and training activities that reflect local, state, and regional economic development priorities. Vermont served as the model for the Workforce Investment Act, which was signed into law in 1998.

How To Reach Me:

BURLINGTON OFFICE:

30 Main Street
Suite 350
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 658-6001

RUTLAND OFFICE:

Lindholm Building, 2nd Floor
2 South Main Street
Rutland, VT 05701
(802) 733-3875

MONTPELIER OFFICE:

58 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 223-5273

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

728 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-5141

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.senate.gov/~jeffords>

TDD/TTY

1-800-835-5500

EMAIL ADDRESS:

vermont@jeffords.senate.gov

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

OFFICIAL BUSINESS